

INAUGURATION DAY

MARCH 4, 1861





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A young DETROIT girl's WITNESS
to the STIRRING events in the CITY
of WASHINGTON on the DAY of
ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S FIRST INAUG-
URATION as revealed in a LETTER
to her SISTERS & An A.L.s. from the
BURTON HISTORICAL COLLECTION
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with an INTRODUCTION and notes
by M. GARNETT McCOY

DETROIT

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INTRODUCTION

John Buel's
THE inauguration of Abraham Lincoln on March 4, 1861, took place in an atmosphere of profound tension and uneasiness. Six states had already followed South Carolina out of the Union, and the capital itself, always a Southern community, was filled with secessionist advocates who openly predicted the early demise of the incoming administration. Northern supporters of the Union demanded punitive measures against rebellious elements and hoped that the new President would take a firm stand in his inaugural address. That the nation was entering the last stage of a shattering crisis was obvious even to the politically unsophisticated girl whose letter from Washington is here reproduced.

Among the 25,000 office seekers, hangers-on, soldiers, potential troublemakers, and plain visitors who deluged Washington for the inauguration was Miss Julia Maria Buel, twenty year old daughter of a prominent Detroit lawyer and political figure. More fortunate than most, she had connections which gave her a position of advantage from which to view the proceedings and to hear the opinions of strategically placed military experts. Her father, Alexander W. Buel, had earlier been a Democratic congressman. In 1861 she was engaged to his law partner, Luther T. Trowbridge, whose brother, William P. Trowbridge, was a government engineer and Washington resident. It was at the latter's house on Lafayette Square that Luther Trowbridge and Miss Buel stayed during the first week of March. Here she met other local personages, including several army and navy officers whose comments on the political situation were both disturbing and prophetic. Apparently they could talk of little else. Even Miss Buel's musical talent, expressed in an impromptu violin recital, failed to divert conversation from the all absorbing topic.

Julia Buel's letter to her sisters at home, Mary Ann, Harriet Clarissa, and Delia Witherell, reveals the enthusiasm of the young tourist and observer of historic events. Like the visitor of today, she dutifully

inspects Washington's notable sights—the Smithsonian Institution, the partially completed Washington Monument, the Capitol, and Mount Vernon. Her impressions of the inauguration and of the atmosphere of the city communicate a sense of the official apprehension. She is struck by the military precautions taken against possible violence, reflecting the general worried feeling in her comment that "the path to the White House was lined with soldiery, and 'Old Abe' is lodged within its walls unharmed." Her references to the acclaim received by Lincoln during his address are interesting in view of the widely held notion that the audience was unresponsive. The imminence of war, recognized and discussed by her acquaintances in the army and navy, impresses her, as does the angry intransigence of Washington's Southern residents, although she is still hopeful that the latter "will come around right before long."

Like most reporters, Miss Buel is sometimes inaccurate. The oath of office was administered after the inaugural address instead of earlier in the Senate chamber. Lincoln was introduced by Senator Baker of Oregon, and not by Senator Hale. Her observations in general, however, agree with what other writers on the subject have had to say, and some of her details are acute—the sentry pacing the lawn of the "young ladies institute"; the dress uniform of the French Minister; the Southern lady who refused to attend the inauguration; Mrs. Lincoln's honest lack of elegant manners.

The letter, faithfully transcribed and reproduced in facsimile on the following pages, includes a fine example of a "crossed" page, a commonly used method of saving paper in the nineteenth century. Preserved by one of its recipients, Mary Ann (Buel) Wetmore, whose daughter, Helen Wetmore, married Charles Beecher Warren, the letter is now a part of the Charles Beecher Warren Papers of the Burton Historical Collection.

M. Garnett McCoy
Curator of Manuscripts,
Burton Historical Collection

Washington D.C.
Inauguration day Mar 4, 1861

My dear sisters Mary, Clara, & Dedie

On such a great day as this I cannot resist taking a few minutes out of it to tell you what is going on about me in our great capital, and what I have had the pleasure of witnessing for myself today. Hurrah for Mr Lincoln! The shouts which have resounded for him at the capital are still ringing in my ears. We have just come from there and left him in the midst of his inaugural address which judging from the cheers of the multitude, must be meeting with considerable favor, for we could not get near enough to hear but a few words. The ceremony of inauguration is very simple itself—and but for the unusual display of military on this occasion, there would have been very little to see. Washington is full of soldiers, and every possible precaution has been and is being taken by Gen Scott to protect the public property and the lives of the citizens. I rode through a short street this morning, where were mounted cannon on both sides, and artillery men to each piece, all ready to fire. A fine company of regulars from West Point are here, the Sappers and Miners, and also two or three companies of cavalry. They are stationed all over the city—some at the corners, on the house roofs, in private yards, and I even saw a sentinel pacing backward and forward in yard of the young ladies institute. This is something very new to me you may imagine. The procession formed about ten o'clock at the capital and marched down Pennsylvania Ave past our window to the Whitehouse and to Willards hotel, to escort the retiring President and the president elect, to the place of inauguration which was at the back part of the capital—a large staging having been erected over the steps. (This staging was occupied by all the *notables*). Mr L. took the oath of office in the senate chamber—that, we were not able to see, as the crowd was so great—but very soon he made his appearance. This was the most interesting moment—the crowd until then perfectly breathless sent up a most glorious shout of welcome. The diplomatic corps appeared next in full dress; that of the French minister was the prettiest I think. The

marine band—at the moment of Mr L's appearance struck up the national airs and played for some few minutes;—(they play most delightfully)—afterwards an old gentleman arose—Mr. Hale,¹ I believe, and presented to us our president Mr Abraham Lincoln with a few words which I could not distinguish. Mr L. then began his address, which I presume you will have read by the time this letter reaches you. We came away very soon as his words were all lost to us. I am very anxious to hear what his sentiments are on the all important questions of the day; this address it is supposed will decide a great deal. As soon we came home I sat down to tell you about *all* this, and to await the procession to the “*white house*” to deposit the lion in his den. You must know that Lizzie's² and my bedroom overlook the *mansion grounds*; indeed we are almost within a stone's throw of the gates.—Well,—the crowd have come and gone—the path to the white house was lined with soldiery, and “*Old Abe*” is lodged within its walls unharmed. Mr Buchanan leaves today I suppose for his Lancaster home, and I imagine with very few to regret his going. Miss Lane³ hates to go very much, they say;—she sat in front of us in church yesterday:—she is very fine looking but not pretty. Mr Buchanan was not at church—I believe he is not a churchgoing man. Neither the preaching or music was worth listening to. Mr. Pyne⁴ had somebody to preach in his place and Miss Juliana May's⁵ voice is not all sweet or pleasing. Tell father that I have visited nearly all the places of interest which he spoke of in his letter except Mount Vernon, and we propose spending our last day there tomorrow. I am perfectly delighted with the capital, and my *American heart* beats with a feeling of *pride, righteous pride*, as I walk through its frescoed chambers and noble halls. The Washington monument is so incomplete that there is nothing there particularly interesting to see. I looked in vain for our copper block in its sides—there is no staircase yet to the top, so that the blocks are most of them invisible. The site is most beautiful—just on the bank of the Potomac. I cannot begin to tell you about one half of the *sights* I have seen. At the Smithsonian

¹ References are to notes on p. 13

I saw things enough to write a book about; curiosities from all parts of the world;—cases of birds of all descriptions and of such beautiful colors as surpass anything I ever saw. The dress which Dr Kane⁶ wore in his Arctic travels is there among other things. A visit to the Navy yard too, we made last Saturday, and the captain of the Pensacola showed us all over it. Mills⁷ statue of Jackson is in the park right in front of Wm Trowbridges⁸ house so we have a good view of that all the time. Major & Mrs Sibley,⁹ Miss Mary Meigs,¹⁰ Susie Ledyard,¹¹ Mrs Macomb¹² & Miss Rogers, Mrs Stockton, The Misses Wilkes & one or two others have called upon us. Lizzie L.¹³ has not honored me yet.—Four of these calls were made last Sunday afternoon much to our surprise after we had come from church. Most all of these I have named are coming over to spend this evening here. Capt Meigs¹⁴ came over to call upon Lute¹⁵ the other evening—he is a most charming man. We shall leave here probably next Wednesday,—day after tomorrow. The opinion of most of the officers here is that we shall have war here very soon, and in that case Washington would be the first place which would be attacked. Capt M., Major Sibley, Capt McCullom¹⁶ of West Point have had long discussions upon the subject with Mr Will T. and all seem to think that civil war is inevitable—and they even go so far as to point out the place for the first attack in the city. In case of any trouble, Mr Trowbridge is going to secure a house in New Jersey somewhere for his wife and family. I cannot bear to anticipate such a thing. Monday evening. 12 o'clock P.M. Late as it is, I am going to take a few minutes to tell you about the little company this evening who have just taken their departure.—in the first place let me tell you that they came partly to hear *votre soeur* the fiddler—Now Dedie dont scold, I couldnt help bringing my violin here. I know you told me not to carry it around with me in your famous epistle which you *finally condescended* to send me. Well, the guests were Cap & Mrs Macomb,¹⁷ Cap & Mrs John Rogers,¹⁸ Col Wilkes¹⁹ and daughters, Miss Meigs, & Miss Gallaudet,²⁰—I believe that was all. It was an informal affair just gotten up this afternoon. Miss Jerusha Rodgers a sister of Kates²¹ husband was here too—we

had a very pleasant evening. I played two pieces—my old "Souvenirs" and the "last rose of summer" with two or three variations. We have talked nothing but politics all the evening. You can have no idea of the state of feeling here.—the southerners are determined not to give Lincoln credit for a single good thing. Washington is full of hot-blooded secessionists. Miss G. told me this evening that she would'nt go to see him inaugurated. Cap. Macomb said this evening that he believed that Lincoln was just the man for the times, and after listening to his address today said that he thought that he would be one of the best Presidents we have ever had. The address today has met with great favor, and although the Southerners here stand on their dignity to a most alarming degree—I think that they will come around right before long. I like old "Honest Abe" very much—and what do you think Miss Dede! I've been presented to him and actually shaken hands with him. John Dunn came for his us last Friday eve to go down to Willards to their reception. We went and were very much pleased. Mrs L. is a plain good sort of a woman, nothing elegant in her manners—rather short—was dressed in lavender moire antique, with sash and lappels—she looks a little like Mrs S M Holmes.²² The Washington ladies criticize her most terribly. I am glad that I am not in her place. But I must say Good night. We are to take a very early start for Mt Vernon (if the weather is clear). This quill is horrible; it is one Aunt Eliza²³ lent me.

Love to all
From Your loving sis

Julie

Washington D.C.

Inauguration day Mar 4 1861

My dear sister Mary, Clara, & Octavia.

On such a great

day as this I cannot resist taking a few minutes
out of it to tell you what is going on about me
in our great capital, and what I have had the
pleasure of witnessing for myself today. How well
for Mr. Lincoln! The shouts which have resounded
for him at the capitol are still ringing in my ears.
We have just come from there and left him in
the midst of his inaugural address which
judging from the cheer of the multitude, must
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The ceremony of inauguration is very simple
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on this occasion, there would have been very
little to see. Washington is full of soldiers, and
every possible precaution has been and is being
taken by Gen Scott to protect the public property
and the lives of the citizens. I rode through a

short shout this morning, where were mounted carmen
on both sides, and artillery, to each piece, all ready
to fire. A fine company of Regulars from West Point
are here, the Lappers and Minors, and also two or three
companies of cavalry. They are stationed all over
the city - some at the corners, on the house roofs,
in private yards, and I can see a sentinel pacing
from back and forward in yard of the young ladies
institute. This is something very new to me you may
imagine. The procession formed about ten o'clock
at the capital and marched down Pennsylvania Avenue
past our window to the Whitehouse and to Willard
Hotel, to escort the retiring President and the
President elect, to the place of inauguration which was at the
back part of the capital - a large staging having been
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all the notables). Mr. L. took the oath of office
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his appearance. This was the most interesting moment.
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most glorious shout of welcome. The diplomatic corps
appeared next in full dress. that of the French

winner was the prettiest I think. The marine band at the moment of Mr. S's appearance struck up the national air and played for some few minutes: - (they play most delightfully) afterwards an old gentleman arose - Mr. Hale, I believe, and presented to us our president Mr. Abraham Lincoln with a few words which I could not distinguish.

Mr. L then began his address, which I presume you will have read by the time this letter reaches you. We came very very soon as his words were all lost to us. I am very anxious to hear what his sentiments are on the all important questions of the day; this address it is supposed will decide a great deal. As soon we come home I sat down to tell you about all this, and to await the permission to the White house to deposit the lion in his den.

You must know that Lizzie's and my bedroom overlook the invacation grounds; - indeed we are almost within a stone & throw of the gates. - Well, - the crowd have come and gone - the path to the White house was lined with soldiers, and Old Abe ^{is} has been lodged within its walls unharmed.

Mr. Buchanan leaves today I suppose for his Sonesta

home, and I imagine with difficulty to repeat his prig.
Mrs. Lane hates to go very much, they say; - she sat
in front of us in church yesterday; - she is very fine
looking but not pretty. Mr. Buchanan was not
at church - I believe he is not a church-going
man. Neither the preaching or music was worth
listening to - Mrs. Pyne had somebody to accompany
her place and Miss Julianne May's voice is not
all sweet or pleasing. Tell father that I have ~~under you~~
visited nearly all the places of interest which he
spoke of in his letter except Mount Vernon, and we ~~will~~
prosperous spending over last day there to-morrow.
I am perfectly delighted with the capital, and
my American heart beats with a feeling of pride
righteous pride, as I walk through its grand
chambers and noble halls. The Washington monument
is so incomplete that there is nothing there particularly
interesting to see. - I looked on ⁱⁿ vain for our
upper block in its sides - there is ^{no} stone ^{as} yet to the
top, so that the blocks are most of them invisible.
The city is most beautiful just on the bank of the
Potowmack. I cannot begin to tell you about one
half of the sights I have seen. At the Smithsonian
I saw things enough to write a book about; curiosities
from all parts of the world; - cases of birds of all
descriptions and of such beautiful colors as surpass
anything I ever saw. The dress which Dr. Lane
wore in the Arctic regions is there among other things.

and war is inevitable - and they even go
far as to point out the place for the final attack
in the city. In case of any trouble. Mr. Tracy
is going to secure a house in New Jersey somewhere
for his wife and family. I cannot bear to
anticipate such a thing. Monday evening, 12 o'clock P.M.
Late as it is, I am going to take a few moments to tell you
about the little company this evening who have just taken
their departure. - in the first place let me tell you that
they came partly to hear ~~with~~ ^{across} the fiddler. - now
Sedie don't scold, I couldn't help bringing my Fiddle ^{with}
here. I know you told me not to carry it around ^{your}
in your former epistles which you finally condescended to
send me. Well, the guests were Cap & Mrs. Meekins,
Cap & Mrs. John Rodgers, Ed. Wilkes and daughter,
Miss Mayes & Miss Gallaudet, - I believe that was all.
It was an informal affair just gotten up this
afternoon. Mrs. Jonathan Rodgers a sister of Peter
induced war here too - we had a very pleasant
evening. I played ten pieces - my old "Lemonade"
and the last song of summer with two or three
variations. We have talked nothing but politics
all the evening. You can have no idea of the
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N O T E S

¹ Lincoln was introduced by Senator Edward Dickinson Baker, 1811-1861, of Oregon, with the words, "Fellow citizens, I introduce to you Abraham Lincoln, the President-elect of the United States."

² Probably Elizabeth Cass (Trowbridge) Wilkins, 1832-1909, daughter of Charles C. Trowbridge of Detroit and wife of William D. Wilkins, an army officer. She was Luther S. Trowbridge's first cousin.

³ Harriet Lane, 1830-1906, President Buchanan's niece and White House hostess.

⁴ Rev. Smith Pyne, 1803-1875, of St. John's Church in Washington.

⁵ Juliana May, a native of Washington, D.C., had studied music abroad and pursued an unsuccessful operatic career in this country.

⁶ Elisha Kent Kane, 1820-1857, a well-known arctic explorer.

⁷ Clark Mills, 1810-1883, sculptor, finished his bronze statue of Andrew Jackson in 1853 after four years of labor. Still standing in Lafayette Square, it was one of Washington's notable sights in 1861.

⁸ William Petit Trowbridge, 1828-1892, of Detroit, a West Point graduate and army engineer. In 1861 he was Secretary of the U.S. Coast Survey.

⁹ Ebenezer Sproat Sibley, 1803-1884, and Harriet Larned (Hunt) Sibley. Raised in Detroit, Sibley was a career officer who saw much active service in the Mexican War and acted as chief assistant to Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs during the Civil War.

¹⁰ Mary Craythorne Meigs, 1838-?, sister of Montgomery C. Meigs.

¹¹ Susan Livingston Ledyard, 1844-1877, daughter of Henry and Matilda (Cass) Ledyard of Detroit.

¹² Nancy (Rodgers) Macomb, 1826-1916, wife of John Navarre Macomb and daughter of Commodore John Rodgers.

¹³ Probably Elizabeth Cass Ledyard, 1840-1918, another daughter of Henry Ledyard.

¹⁴ Montgomery Cunningham Meigs, 1816-1892, Union Quartermaster General during the Civil War. In the 1840's he had supervised construction of Fort Wayne at Detroit. His wife was Louisa Rodgers, another daughter of Commodore Rodgers.

¹⁵ Luther Stephen Trowbridge, 1836-1913, married Julia Buel in April 1862. He served in the 5th and 10th Michigan Cavalry Regiments in the Civil War, was brevetted Brigadier General in 1865, and subsequently became a prominent Detroit lawyer and public figure.

¹⁶ George Washington Cullum, 1809-1892, an army engineer and aide to General Winfield Scott in 1861.

¹⁷ John Navarre Macomb, 1811-1889, and Nancy (Rodgers) Macomb. A West Pointer, Macomb saw service in the Corps of Engineers during the Civil War.

¹⁸ John Rodgers, 1812-1882, and Ann Elizabeth (Hodge) Rodgers. A prominent naval officer, Rodgers was the brother of Mrs. Meigs and Mrs. Macomb.

¹⁹ Apparently Captain Charles Wilkes, 1798-1877, U.S.N., a well-known explorer and famous a few months later for his capture of Mason and Slidell, Confederate Commissioners to England.

²⁰ Member of a socially prominent Washington family.

²¹ Katherine Sproat (Trowbridge) Rodgers, 1829-?, wife of Lt. Henry Rodgers.

²² Mrs. Silas M. Holmes, wife of a leading Detroit merchant and anti-slavery leader.

²³ Elizabeth Susannah Trowbridge, 1788-1865, Luther S. Trowbridge's aunt.

This keepsake by the Friends
of the Detroit Public Library,
honoring the centennial of
the First Inauguration of
Abraham Lincoln, was done
in an edition of 1500 copies,
1200 of which have been
set aside for members and
300 are for general sale.

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